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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002607

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: NINEWA: SOME HAMDANIYA CHRISTIANS ARGUE FOR LOCAL  
AUTONOMY, OTHERS SEE IT AS A KURDISH PLOT

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader Alex Laskaris, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During meetings in Mosul with Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq Tom Krajeski, Iraqi Assyrian groups from Hamdaniya District in Ninewa Province expressed varying views on the desirability of an autonomous Christian region and affiliation with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). A group of Christians from Bartella strongly advocated for local administrative autonomy for Christians, including control of local development budgets and police forces. In a separate meeting, a group of Christians from Qaraqosh said the push for Christian autonomy was a Kurdish plot to obtain support for Kurdish territorial claims in Hamdaniya. End summary.

¶2. (C) Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq Tom Krajeski traveled to Ninewa Province August 11 and 12 for meetings hosted by PRT Mosul and in the western Ninewa towns of Tal Afar and Sinjar. In Mosul, Krajeski met with two groups of Christians -- Assyrian Catholic leaders from the Hamdaniya District town of Bartella, headed by George Maya of the Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council of America (CASA) and Father Aymon Dana Paulus, and Christian leaders from Qaraqosh, also in Hamdaniya, led by Sargon Nimrud, a high ranking member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) who runs the Assyrian Ashor TV station. In all meetings, S/A Krajeski stressed USG concern for the welfare of all religious and ethnic minority communities in Ninewa: Christian, Yezidi and Shabak.

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One Group Demands Local Christian Control  
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¶3. (C) Fr. Aymon said he strongly favors "autonomy" for Christian communities (distinguishing this from "self-rule," which he defined as control of local administrative structures and which already exists in many Christian villages). "Autonomy" is the only way to protect Christian communities in Hamdaniya and ensure their rights as a minority are respected, he said. Asked whether a Christian enclave would be practical, given that there are Christian communities dispersed throughout Iraq, Fr. Aymon said that autonomy did not necessarily mean a physical homeland. Rather, autonomy to him means: A) full constitutional rights for Christians; B) Christian control of the budget in Christian localities so that they direct their own economic development; and C) Christian political control over Christian towns and villages, including control over Iraqi Police units with Christian officers.

¶4. (C) Aymon said the Iraqi Constitution does not protect minority rights, so legally, Christians are treated as third class citizens.<sup>8</sup> Even if Christians had adequate legal protections, the precarious security situation in the country would undercut full enjoyment of those rights. He complained that Shia Shabaks were moved into traditionally Christian areas as part of the former government's policy of purposeful demographic change. Fr. Aymon and his colleagues

said that, absent expeditious action, the Christian community in Iraq will disappear ("it is on the verge of extinction") within five years due to continuing violence and resulting pressure to emigrate. While he did not address specifically whether Christian areas should be absorbed into the KRG, Fr. Ayman and his group have not come out in opposition to Kurdish territorial claims in Hamdaniya, although he told S/A Krajeski "we are proud to be Iraqis."

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A Second Sees Calls for Autonomy as a Kurdish Plot  
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15. (C) Sargon Nimrud and the Christian leaders from Qaraqosh presented a somewhat different view from the Christians of Bartella. (Comment: Nimrud and other ADM officials allege that CASCA is politically tied to and supported by the KRG. End comment.) Nimrud, who strongly rejects KRG territorial claims on Hamdaniya, said Christian autonomy in areas incorporated into KRG will mean Kurdish domination and Christian suffering. Nimrud alleged that those Christians asking for autonomy are pawns of Sarkis Aghajan (KRG Minister of Finance, an Assyrian Christian), who is paying for their militias in an attempt to buy support within the Christian community for Kurdish expansion. Nimrud and his delegation share Fr. Ayman's concern over security for Christians, but blame Kurdish obstacles at the provincial level. For example, Nimrud said that Kurdish elements in the IP are actively preventing the recruitment of Christians into the police.

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